

9. LESSER FRIGATE BIRDS (*FREGATA MINOR*)
IN BOMBAY

On Monday June 29th, and again on Sunday July 5th, 1953, I saw Frigate birds (*Fregata minor*) on the west side of the Colaba peninsula between the point opposite Prongs Lighthouse and the Naval Wireless Station.

A single bird was observed for about a quarter of an hour on Monday June 29th. It was soaring over the partially covered reef and moving sideways in the strong wind. No other birds were close to it, though a party of crows were flying low over and settling on rocks about 400 ft. to the southward of it.

Identification was, I think, pretty sure. Large dark brown bird with a grey-white throat and part of breast, distinctly forked tail which opened up to show the fork when the bird moved sideways in the wind. The beak with a curved tip was more sharp than that of any gannet.

On Sunday July 5th, two birds were seen close to the Colaba Point. I could not get as close as to the one on Monday; but was able to note that the darker of the two was the smaller, probably a male, and that both showed distinctly forked long tails as they floated in the wind. The birds kept close together, rarely more than a few yards apart.

I understand that these 'man-o-war hawks' do not often move to this part of the coast.

COMMODORE'S HOUSE,
COLABA,
BOMBAY.

R. M. T. TAYLOR

July 15, 1953.

[On June 26th, 1945, Mr. C. McCann had first reported seeing an example at Bandra Creek, which was being chivvied by crows, but it was not published at the time since it was merely the sight record of a species that had never occurred here before; neither had any confirmation been received since. The distribution of the Western race *aldabrensis*, to which our birds presumably belonged, is given in the Fauna (Birds, 6: 297) as: 'Aldabra, Seychelles, Glorioso. A female was obtained by Nicoll in Ceylon.' Commodore Taylor's description of the bird and its deeply forked tail now leaves no doubt as to the correctness of his as well as Mr. McCann's diagnosis. By a remarkable coincidence, moreover, the very next morning after the record was received by us, Mr. Sálím Ali also observed a solo Frigate Bird flying quite low over his residence on Pali Hill, Bandra, so that even without binoculars its identity was unmistakable.—EDS.]

10. BIRDS OF NEPAL

Through the kind permission of the Government of Nepal the author has been able to carry on a study of the birds of that country for the past four years. Our first expedition to Nepal was from the end of October, 1949, to January 31st, 1950. It was sponsored by the

late H. B. Conover, Associate Curator of Ornithology at the Chicago Museum of Natural History. On this initial trip the author was accompanied by Carl E. Taylor, M.D., R. T. Bergsaker and H. Bergsma. We visited the western districts of Butwal, Palpa, Baglung and Pokhara where we gathered some 720 specimens representing 256 species as identified at the Chicago Museum.

Three private trips were subsequently taken. From December 1951 to February 1952, the author's wife, Bethel H. Fleming, M.D., and Carl W. Friedericks, M.D., carried on medical work while the author and his 14-year old son, Robert L. Fleming II, continued the project in ornithology. Most of the time was spent in and around Tansen; Pokhara was revisited in February. A total of 375 skins were taken, representing 133 species of which 24 were additions to our Nepal list. On our next visit the author was again accompanied by his son and Richard B. Parker, students of Woodstock High School and members of the Woodstock Natural History Society. We worked in the south-western districts of Kailali and Kanchanpur and made a short trip into the hills of Doti. Here we gathered about 400 specimens (from November 1952 to January 1953) including about 100 species new to our list. A fourth visit made by the author, his wife and son, was to the Central Valley (January-February, 1953). Some 150 skins were prepared of which about 25 were of those which we had not had before.

NEPAL COLLECTIONS

The most comprehensive collection of birds ever to be made in Nepal was that of the British Resident, Brian Hodgson, from 1821 to 1843. Species totalled 563. No extensive work was done until fairly recently when Ripley visited Nepal in 1947-49 and took 1,600 skins representing 331 species. During the past six years Colonel and Mrs. Proud have recorded well over 300 kinds of birds in the Central Valley and have collected over 250 of them. Our present total is near 410. These are in the Chicago Museum while other birds from Nepal are in the U.S. National Museum, the American Museum, the Peabody Museum and the British Museum.

Among our birds there appear to be one or two new sub-species such as a laughing thrush similar to *Garrulax affinis affinis*, found at 9,000 ft. below Tukche and a Pompadour Green Pigeon from the Butwal *terai*. At least one and perhaps others have never been reported before from Nepal. Mrs. Proud identified Hodgson's White-gorgetted Flycatcher which Bob Fleming II got this winter at Godaveri in the Kathmandu Valley.

INTERESTING LOCALITIES AND SPECIES

1. The *terai* of Kailali and Kanchanpur. We worked the area around Dhangarhi, Kailali, for three weeks. Surrounding Dhangarhi were open cultivations, rice fields, here and there a reedy pond beyond which lay scrub jungle and virgin forests. Here we found the Redwhiskered Bulbul, Bluebearded Bee-eater, Indian Courser, Wryneck, Starling, Bank Myna, Indian Shama, Yellow-eyed and Bengal Redcapped Babblers and many others.

From Kailali we travelled in stages by ox carts to Barmdeo Mandi in the extreme southwestern corner of Nepal. En route we stopped at Bilauri, the chief town of Kanchanpur, known for its numerous ungulates and carnivora. Here were the Swamp Partridge, Cormorants, Pallas's Fishing Eagle, Peafowl, River and Blackbellied Terns. In the valley above the Sarda River we found the Ruby-throat, Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo, Crested Swift and Purple Heron. As far as adding new species to our list, this *terai* area was most rewarding.

2. **Butwal.** The heavy forest at the base of the Siwalik Range was especially rich in woodpeckers. These included the Mahratta Woodpecker and the Great Slaty Woodpecker several of which we watched for some time as they called and drilled into tall trees bordering a small stream. Here we found the Shama and the Orangeheaded Ground Thrush, both of which proved to be more abundant farther west. In the scrub jungle around Butwal were Purple Sunbirds, Pigmy and Jungle Owlets and the Sirkeer Cuckoo. Four or five miles up the road towards Tansen, in and around Ranibas (2,500 ft.) the greatest amount of bird life was found. The Orangebreasted Chloropsis inhabited every tree. The Blackbreasted Sunbird, Bronze Drongo, Bluethroated Barbet, Trogon, Broadbill, Golden Bush-robin, Green Magpie and many others made up this bird paradise.

3. **Tansen.** The Srinagar Forest on the northern slopes above Tansen was a place which we combed thoroughly for six weeks. The area was about one square mile in extent. We were well acquainted with the birds here including one Nepal Kalij hen which dared to live so close to civilization. Of all the species represented, perhaps the most interesting was the Spiny Babbler. Actually only three of our 15 Spinys were taken from this forest. They were from three separate groups. One of them was at the edge of a terraced field; there were four birds in all. Another party of two or three was under a brow of a hill in grass and among shrubs. A third, consisting of two Spinys and two Scimitar Babbler was in scrub oak among damp ferns. In most cases the Scimitar Babbler were with or not far away from the Spinys. Farther west in the foothills of Doti where we collected nine Spinys, they were also in company of Scimitar Babbler. We ran onto them daily in almost the same places in parties from two to seven. Their calls, consisting of several kinds of notes, were rather subdued. The most characteristic sound as they hopped around on the ground in a group like Seven Sisters was a low *chur-r-r-r-r*, *chur-r-r-r-r-r*. The louder sound was like *el el el ele*. One morning several were out in the open near an empty shed. I heard the second call and as I stalked them they whirred to cover. When I got quite close to them, the warning *chur-r-r-r* was given again. It was all on the same note and sounded almost like a whistle. The birds would then fade out of sight only to peep out behind vegetation not far away. It was lots of fun watching them. They liked certain fallow fields thick with an *Artemisia* shrub. When disturbed at the edge of cultivation they would fly quickly to low trees in a neighbouring field and from

there move one after another up the hill. When on the ground in thick under-growth they seemed to melt out of sight only to reappear not far away. It soon became apparent that the males had much whiter throats than the females and at times almost resembled miniature Chinese Waterhens the way they glided along.

4. *Tukche and Vicinity.* Tukche is a large village along the Kali Gandak River at 9,000 ft. to the north of the Dhaulagiri and Annapurna Ranges. The most common bird there was the Tibetan Sparrow. Wrens were occasionally found in the stone walls bordering cultivated fields. Early each morning the Redbilled Chough flew down from the towering cliffs above the village into the streets. The bills and tarsi of these birds were much more massive than those from Kulu, Northern Punjab. Both the Tibetan and the Himalayan Snowcocks inhabited the ridges at 16,000 and 17,000 ft. while the Snow Partridge was found a little lower down.

The first snowfall of the season in 1949 was on December 11th. A strong wind was blowing and as the snow began, hundreds of birds sought shelter in the hedges and shallow valleys along the river about five miles north of Tukche. There was the Beautiful Rosefinch, the Altai Accentor, the Rufousbreasted Accentor, Gldenstadt's Redstart, the Chukor Partridge and others which we could not identify. It was said that the Tibetan Partridge would also be found at the edge of the river but we took it at 13,000 ft. a few days before the snow fell. In this area the Tibetan Tit-Warbler and the Whitethroated Redstart were also present.

5. *Pokhara.* Lake Pehra Tal is the home of the Great Crested Grebe. Here also were the Gray and the Blackbacked Forktails, the Green Heron, Spurwinged Plover and a number of ducks. A Spiny Babbler was collected along one of the streets in the town while another was taken from a small flock at the base of a hill to the north-east of the parade ground. Numerous wagtails flew about the rice fields while the Haircrested Drongo was frequently seen in the silk cotton tree.

6. *Kathmandu Valley.* Some more than half the species seen in the Valley in winter are also represented in Western Nepal. The most memorable scenes centred around the great oaks, *Quercus semecarpifolia*, where several kinds of birds clustered on the trunk of a tree drinking the sap which flowed down over the bark. On the 8,000-9,000 ft. ridges of Phulchauk, where these trees were numerous, we found the Cutia, Hoary Barwing, Stripethroated Yuhina, Yellowbrowed Tit and the Chestnut-headed Flycatcher-Warbler. Higher were the Yellowbilled Magpie and the Darjeeling Woodpecker.

The lower valleys around Godaveri were most rewarding. Here was the Pitta, Striated Bulbul, Scarlet Finch, Rufousthroated Shrike-Babbler, Graysided Babbler, Quaker Babbler, Striated Babbler, Large Niltava, Plainbacked Mountain Thrush, the Nepal Kalij Pheasant and the Rufousthroated Hill Partridge. At Naggarjung we found the

Spottedwinged Grosbeak. The Green Shrike-Babbler was on Shivpuri while dippers at Sunderijal, by February, were feeding their young.

The question has frequently been asked, 'How many kinds of birds are there in Nepal?' From our experience we would say that we have collected about two of every three species seen. That would make the number for Western and Central Nepal at least 600. A rough estimate of 200 in Eastern Nepal would bring the total to 800, more or less. Although a partial study has already been made, a great deal of work remains to be done. As complete a collection as possible should be made, not only for a foreign institution which is expert in taxonomy but also for the National Museum at Kathmandu where visitors may see at a glance what is found in that country.

Much of the field work of the past few years has been done only during winter or spring. A round-the-year study of seasonal migrations and shift in bird populations should be made for Eastern and Western Nepal as the Prouds are doing for the Central Valley. Nidification and habits of numerous species are as yet practically unknown. The life histories of such birds remain to be done. Such problems as these constitute a real challenge to anyone who studies the ornithology of Nepal.

WOODSTOCK SCHOOL,
MUSSOORIE,
May 15, 1953.

ROBERT L. FLEMING

II. THE USE OF POISONOUS SPRAYS

'The Shooting Correspondent' writes to *Sport & Country* (17th September, 1952) that for several years 'selective' weed killers 'have been in use to destroy weeds in corn crops or on grassland. They are highly complex chemicals which generally kill most of the broad-leaved plants but have little or no effect on the cereals and grasses. There are quite a lot of these chemicals differing slightly in their properties and nature, but broadly speaking they can be divided into two groups, those containing nitro compounds and those of which the active principle is a hormone or growth-distorting substance. The hormones such as MCPA and 2-4D, seem to have little or no effect on animals and birds even when eaten in considerable amounts on sprayed vegetation, so they can be regarded as harmless so far as direct poisoning of game is concerned. The nitro compounds are the nasty ones, mostly yellow liquids containing a substance called Di-nitro cresol (DNC for short). In many instances where a spray of this type has been used on young corn, pheasants, partridges, hares, rabbits and lots of small birds have been picked up dead. They can be poisoned by eating the sprayed weeds or simply by walking about in the corn and absorbing the stuff through their skins. . . . If we must use DNC, surely it could be confined to those cases where it is the only thing that will do the job?

But I am afraid that we have by no means reached the climax of this grim story of chemical farming. Only this week I heard from a farmer in Gloucestershire who had picked up literally a